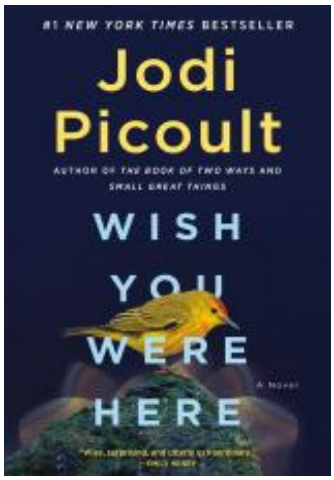
Wish You Were Here

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Jodi Picoult comes a deeply moving novel about the resilience of the human spirit in a moment of crisis.

Diana O?Toole is perfectly on track. She will be married by 30, done having kids by 35, and move out to the New York City suburbs, all while climbing the professional ladder in the cutthroat art auction world. She?s an associate specialist at Sotheby?s now, but her boss has hinted at a promotion if she can close a deal with a high-profile client. She?s not engaged just yet, but she knows her boyfriend, Finn, a surgical resident, is about to propose on their romantic getaway to the Galápagos --- days before her 30th birthday. Right on time.

But then a virus that felt worlds away has appeared in the city, and on the eve of their departure, Finn breaks the news: It?s all hands on deck at the hospital. He has to stay behind. You should still go, he assures her, since it would be a shame for all of their nonrefundable trip to go to waste. And so, reluctantly, she goes.

Almost immediately, Diana?s dream vacation goes awry. Her luggage is lost, the Wi-Fi is nearly nonexistent, and the hotel they?d booked is shut down due to the pandemic. In fact, the whole island is now under quarantine, and she is stranded until the borders reopen. Completely isolated, she must venture beyond her comfort zone. Slowly, she carves out a connection with a local family when a teenager with a secret opens up to Diana, despite her father?s suspicion of outsiders.

In the Galápagos Islands, where Darwin?s theory of evolution by natural selection was formed, Diana finds herself examining her relationships, her choices and herself --- and wondering if when she goes home, she too will have evolved into someone completely different.

Discussion Guide

The questions below have major spoilers for the book. Please come back here once you have finished reading and are ready to dive into a discussion.

1. What was it like to revisit March 2020 right at the moment the world changed as we entered the pandemic? Did the author capture what it felt like when everything started? Was it strange to think back to that time? What emotions and thoughts came up as you started to read?

2. Diana was trapped in the Galápagos, unable to return to New York City due to travel restrictions. But she managed to make friends and explore the island every day. Do you think she would have been more or less isolated if she had stayed in the city?

3. Diana chooses to stay on Isabela, even though she knows it might mean getting stuck there. Would you have made the same decision? Has there ever been a time in your life when you made a split-second decision that surprised you?

4. When Diana realizes she is stuck without any resources on the island, she is rescued by the generosity of Abuela. How does Abuela?s instinct to come to a stranger?s aid compare to Gabriel?s instinct to preserve the needs of himself and his family first? Is one or the other?s motivations better justified?

5. Think about how Diana and Gabriel?s relationship evolves over the course of the book. How does their understanding of one another compare to the way Diana and Finn relate?

6. Why do you think Diana was able to form such a close bond with Beatriz? What can the book teach us about mental health and how to help those who are struggling?

7. What did you think about the revelation that Diana didn?t physically get stranded on Isabela after all? Did you see the twist coming, or did it surprise you?

8. Do you think unconscious, lucid experiences like Diana?s have meaning? Are these experiences ?real? in some way?

9. Diana insists that she must have gotten COVID and imagined her time in the Galápagos for a reason, while Finn believes that ?viruses don?t need reasons.? What do you think about the way other people (Finn, Dr. DeSantos, Rodney, others) react to Diana?s experience?

10. Diana instantly connects with Kotomi Ito over the Toulouse-Lautrec painting, something that held huge promise for Diana?s career. When Diana returns to New York and recovers, she bumps into Kotomi in Central Park, eventually meeting up regularly to walk together. Why do you think the author chose to include this storyline?

11. Art is described as a partnership between the artist and the viewer. Do you agree? How does this relationship differ from the one between an art therapist and a patient?

12. Diana and her mother have a complicated relationship, but by the end of the novel, Diana understands her mom much better and is finally able to forgive her. What do you think allowed Diana to forgive? In what ways do our relationships with our parents --- even when those relationships are tense --- define who we are?

13. What was your reaction to Diana?s increasing certainty that marrying Finn isn?t what she wants for herself after all? Have you ever realized that the plans you have for your future don?t align with your desires?

14. Darwin?s theory of natural selection --- gleaned from his research in the Galápagos --- addresses how isolation can be both a curse and a blessing. Has humanity ?evolved? during the pandemic? Why or why not?

15. COVID-19 changed Diana --- from her job to her personal relationships --- but do you think those changes would have still happened if 2020 was ?normal?? How did the pandemic change you? What lessons did you learn about yourself, and what changes to your life will you keep as we move forward?

16. How do you interpret the book?s ending? Who do you think has saved Diana from falling?

17. WISH YOU WERE HERE deals with the pandemic in ways that can be intense. Jodi Picoult even discusses in her Author?s Note that she struggled with finding a way to process these unprecedented events, and wondered: ?How do we tell the tale of how the world shut down, and why, and what we learned?? How did reading about the pandemic compare to experiencing it? What kinds of emotions and reflections did the book bring up for you? What parts of the early pandemic had you already forgotten?

18. Who would you cast to play the characters in a TV or movie adaptation of WISH YOU WERE HERE?

Author Bio

Jodi Picoult is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of over 30 novels, including HOLLOW BONES, BY ANY OTHER NAME, MAD HONEY (co-authored with Jennifer Finney Boylan), WISH YOU WERE HERE, THE BOOK OF TWO WAYS, A SPARK OF LIGHT, SMALL GREAT THINGS, LEAVING TIME and MY SISTER'S KEEPER, and, with daughter Samantha van Leer, two young adult novels, BETWEEN THE LINES and OFF THE PAGE. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband.

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